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Vernaculars in Translation: A Cold War Tourist and His Camera

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Cold War culture presents as a binary system: East and West; encirclement and containment; international communism and democratic capitalism; patriotism and contagion; escalation and détente. This dual pattern is also stamped on photographic culture and experience. Iconic Modernist photography, exemplified by the era's picture magazines and photographic exhibitions, symbolizes global divisions as struggles between light and shadow – between unexamined truths and unspeakable invisibilities. As repositories of collective memory, these public presentations have been scrutinized for their ideological messages. Still underconsidered is the bulk of the period's available data, the snapshot world, which colourfully constitutes a hidden 'history from below'. Enshrining the nuclear family in a time of potential nuclear annihilation, the domestic slide show is both product and producer of Cold War conditioning.

A Cold War Tourist and His Camera (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), co-authored by political scientist John Langford and myself, draws on a particularly apposite collection, a study in Cold War vernacular photography occasioned by the curriculum of Canada's National Defence College in 1962-63. Among these Cold-Warriors-in-training was our father Warren Langford (1919-1997), who visited theatres of Cold War defence and ideological struggle in North America, Africa, and Europe, creating slide shows for his family along the way. My paper introduces our study's correlation of Cold War orthodoxies and photographic experience, and considers the implications of translating our father's slide show from the private to the public realm.

Biographical Note

Martha Langford is an associate professor and Concordia University Research Chair in Art History at Concordia University in Montreal. Major works include *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (2001) and *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art* (2007), as well as an edited collection, *Image & Imagination* (2005), all from McGill-Queen's University Press. *A Cold War Tourist and His Camera*, co-written with John Langford, has just been published (MQUP, 2011).

Her recent essays include “A Short History of Photography in Canada, 1900–2000,” in A. Whitelaw, B. Foss, and S. Paikowsky, eds., *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2010); “The Child in Me: A Figure of Photographic Creation,” in L. Lerner, ed., *Depicting Canada’s Children* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009); “Imagined Memories: On Rafael Goldchain’s Family Album,” in his *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2008); and “Strange Bedfellows: Appropriations of the Vernacular by Photographic Artists,” *Photography & Culture* 1:1 (July 2008).

Langford is a contributing editor for *Border Crossings* (Winnipeg), *Exit* (Madrid) and *Photography & Culture* (London), an advisory board member for *Ciel variable* (Montreal), and a regular book reviewer for *Source* (Belfast). She is editor-in-chief of *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d’histoire de l’art canadien* and co-editor, with Sandra Paikowsky, of the MQUP/Beaverbrook Foundation Series on Canadian Art History.